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AUTHOR Mackey, Margaret
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ABSTRACT

Reading is invisible. Any report of another's reading (beyond the level of word recognition) must rely on some kind of reproduction of the actual experience; there is no way to tap into the experience itself. After completing a pilot study, a small number of adolescents--5 eighth graders and 5 eleventh graders read the first four chapters of Gillian Cross' "Wolf" and later took the book home to finish reading it. Then, meeting again with the researcher, they worked through these chapters a second time, and finally, they discussed the book as a whole. Results focused on how readers decide if their interpretations of the text are "good enough," a value growing out of a student's own individual balance between momentum and accountability, or in other words, between their need for pace and their need to understand. Some readers have a bias towards momentum and go with the flow of the text, while others have a bias towards accountability and are more careful to understand every detail before going on. A detailed accounting shows how three students in particular wrestled with the problem of "good enough." And one specific issue arose in discussion with the readers--the question of re-reading. Conclusions focus on the triangular tension between the reader's personal experience of the text, the text itself, and the experience others have in reading a text. (Contains 10 references.) (TB)

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HOW READERS PROCESS COMPLEX LITERARY TEXTS

Margaret Mackey
Department of Secondary Education
University of Alberta

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Reading is invisible. Any report of another's reading (beyond the level of word recognition) must rely on some kind of reproduction of the actual experience; there is no way to tap into the experience itself. Furthermore, reading takes place over time and, until it is finished, it is partial. A reader only grasps the whole when the reading is finished--if then. Up to that point, the reader is dealing with partial data, exploring, predicting, extrapolating, coordinating. Any report on a reading in progress must allow for confusion, misunderstanding, forgetting and false prediction.

It is impossible to read without reading *something*. The text affects the reader's behaviour and reactions and must be taken into account in any study of a reader's actions and thoughts. Like other human activities, reading has a content and a context. The reader exists in a specific situation and culture, reads for a particular purpose. The text has been created by someone (also culturally situated) who presumably has also had some kind of purpose in mind.

What happens as we read? Is it possible to describe our own experience without destroying it? Can we pin down the cognitive, affective and imaginative details of what we experience and describe how it works from the inside? Is it possible to explore the reading of someone else, to make comparisons between different experiences of the same text? If so, how do we make allowances for the fact that we tend to see what we are looking for?

Reading is a complicated, contradictory, often messy activity. Personal private reading occurs in situations which are noisy and cluttered. And yet, to remove the reading to the laboratory, to excise the noise and clutter in the cause of greater clarity, paradoxically creates the danger of separating reading from its social and cultural roots. To explore and describe without being reductive is a huge challenge.

The act of reading involves the orchestration of a dauntingly complex collection of skills in order to process a large amount of information. Such a performance can be described fairly clinically; Rolf A. Zwaan (1993) offers one example of a definition of such a complex operation:

> In short, a cognitive control system is a package of knowledge structures and procedures, which is triggered by outside information or by other cognitive structures (goals) and which regulates the behavior of an individual in a situation. This implies that individuals can get into a certain situation by their own volition (e.g. playing a game of chess, asking someone else to dance, picking up a novel), or due to external factors (e.g. accidentally meeting an extremely boring acquaintance, or being told by someone like Stanley Fish to interpret a "poem"). In either case the appropriate control system, once activated, regulates the cognitive operations of the individual. (17)

Zwaan has a number of observations about the complexity of learning to read: "we do not

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become skilled readers of literary novels overnight." (18)

> To put it more precisely, through time and experience control systems become more complex, elaborate and sophisticated. The next question addresses the causes of this refinement of control systems. Two potential major sources can be identified: *incidental learning*, through regular confrontations with a particular text type, and *explicit instruction*. (18)

I do not disagree with Zwaan's description; in theory, at least, he makes room for at least some effects of clutter in his mention of incidental learning. When we look in detail at the temporal processes which individual readers apply to texts, however, I think we find much more going on than Zwaan allows for. Marilyn Wilson and Sharon Thomas (1995) describe some of the personal readings which specific students produced for particular texts.

> The idiosyncratic interpretations students produced convinced us that although prior experience and knowledge of similar situations usually contribute positively to reading comprehension, the particular nature of readers' experiences, the degree of emotional commitment, and the existence of prior assumptions or cultural myths that they bring to reading texts can complicate comprehension. (53)

Wilson and Thomas explore some examples of personal interpretation on a relatively macro or high-level scale. In the paper which follows, I wish to discuss some aspects of reading on a more moment-to-moment basis, investigating the idiosyncratic nature of some micro-decisions made by student readers and looking at the consequences of their choices. An examination of these fleeting choices can illuminate how the students' own readings were affected; it can also show how an awareness of such decision-making may affect our theoretical and professional understanding of the time-based nature of reading.

Marking boundaries

In the report which follows, I will discuss some implications of a project which explored what happens when people read fiction. I set up this study with particular conditions in mind. I could not envisage a completely naturalistic approach, but I wanted to maintain as much "normality" in the reading situation as possible. I was interested, above all, in establishing whether it is possible to gain some kind of access into ways in which readers may establish a form of imaginative engagement with a piece of written fiction. At the same time, I needed to control the size of the project so that some form of comparative description might be possible.

The first step was to limit numbers. After a pilot study which involved a somewhat larger group, I worked intensively with a small number of adolescents--five eighth graders and five eleventh graders. I saw each one separately, taping and transcribing all discussions.

All readers encountered the same text. I was interested in studying what happens as readers process a complex literary fiction, so I chose a sophisticated young adult novel, *Wolf*, by Gillian Cross. This novel offered a useful combination of limits and potential. It is based on a fairly conventional thriller plot but the text is interwoven with fragments of many other kinds of text: fairly tales, myths and legends, etymology, natural history. Readers could interpret this text at a fairly superficial level but it would reward deeper and more complex exploration.

Another limitation was that readers worked with me only on the first four chapters. However, they then took the book home to finish reading in their normal domestic surroundings. After they had completed this first reading of the whole book, we worked through the first four chapters a second time. This time the readers had some idea about plot and construction, and, in discussion of their new understanding, I hoped to gain some insight into how they had read the remainder of the book. In addition, after this second reading of the opening section of the book, we discussed the book as a whole, giving them the opportunity to raise questions, offer opinions, and so forth.

With each chapter, on both the first and second readings, the participant read the chapter in silence and then offered a retrospective think-aloud of the encounter before proceeding to the next chapter. I chose the retrospective approach for several reasons. Judith Langer's 1986 study suggests (178 - 179) that there is little to choose between a concurrent and a retrospective think-aloud protocol. That being the case, the balance of "normality" clearly lies with a retrospective interruption. Reading requires attention; such attention divided between text and tape recorder is less concentrated. There is also the important issue of momentum, to which I shall return later. The situation in which these readers found themselves was abnormal enough already; I did not wish to interfere with their ability to become immersed in the text by constantly asking them to switch their attention to the need to report. I could find out about such aspects of reading as ease of word recognition by constant monitoring but I was concerned that issues such as ease of imaginative engagement might be destroyed by intrusive monitoring. The chapter-ending report was a compromise. The breaks in the text were those established by the author, and the readers would be reporting frequently enough that they would be able to raise questions, enigmas, confusions, without the smoothing benefit of hindsight.

Some results

Obviously, the results of such an operation were complex. The transcripts provide a wealth of very rich data as the readers locate themselves in relation to the world of the text and decide on fruitful ways of proceeding. The contrasts between the first and second readings are also fascinating.

It is not possible in a conference paper to do justice to all the findings of such a complex study. I want to concentrate on one particular issue which arose for the first time in the pilot study and was considerably illuminated by the findings of the final project. This issue is the question how readers decide if their interpretations of the text are "good enough" to be going on with.

The idea of the "good enough" reading is one which can easily be lost in the ways different disciplines treat literature. First readings and later readings are more often than not conflated in the creation of a critical response (see Mackey 1993). Much of any single reading of a complex text may be fleeting, inchoate, nebulous, temporary. We may make errors of interpretation which we later amend without ever being aware that we were once misguided. The slipperiness of any single reading is extraordinary; that effect is compounded in a *first* reading where the reader is trying to ascertain how the author is composing the address. *What* is significant on this page and how can I develop criteria to make judgements about significance? How does my judgement about this page enable me to move on to the next page? Even the achievement of a reading that is "good enough" for the moment, "good enough" to enable me to keep reading is an accomplishment of considerable affective and cognitive complexity.

Daniel

One student in the pilot study gave me explicit insight into some of these processes. Most pilot study participants were undergraduates but Daniel was a Ph.D. student. Whether it was this factor that made him particularly articulate about his own processes I cannot say, but his account of his reading was informative.

The main setting of *Wolf* is a London squat, a derelict house illegally occupied. Daniel had never been to London and puzzled over the meaning and appearance of the squat.

> Okay, then I also didn't understand what a squat meant at the bottom of page 10 cause it said that it had been knocked down so to me that seemed like some kind of a makeshift, a makeshift housing thing. . . . Again, I had this picture in my mind of one of these makeshift kinds of cardboard houses which people in, in refugee camps live in almost, but I somehow knew that wasn't right. But I'm having difficulty getting a picture of what this is like, okay?

The story moves to the kitchen of the squat which has been completely demolished. Daniel's description of his reading problems became even more explicit.

> What's funny is, I know in my mind I was picturing that incorrectly but I couldn't change the picture. Intellectually I knew that what I was picturing about the inside of this house wasn't what was. Mine was much too bungalowy, you know, it was too much 1950s bungalow. And I knew that wasn't right but somehow I couldn't replace it. . . . All through the whole book, I know it's not right but I'll never get it out of my mind. . . . The bizarre part is, I even knew that there was a little camp-type stove on the floor, but not in my mind! When they were cooking, it was on a stove. You know, until I just once in a while would make the shift.

Daniel's most interesting assertion was that none of this improper visualization really mattered.

> It made no difference whatso--really. It didn't make a difference because this book isn't about that setting.

Purists may argue that a book is always about its setting but, in larger terms, Daniel was making a defensible case: the real "setting" of *Wolf* is in much more mythic territory; the precise physical details of the characters' surroundings matter somewhat less.

Daniel was more self-analytical than the younger subjects of this study and made articulate what many of them mentioned in more incoherent terms. He also appears to be a reader with a strong propensity towards visual imaging and not everybody falls into that category. However, there were many examples in the main study of readers making use of Daniel's apparent criterion: I know it's not really correct but it is good enough for the moment, good enough to enable me to keep reading, good enough to sustain my engagement with the book.

Hami

Sometimes a misunderstanding surfaced in the early stages of the first reading of the book and later disappeared without apparent trace. An eighth grade reader, Hami, for example, made an early misinterpretation over both the setting and the relationships between the main characters. He took in that the squatters lived in a large house (for which there is clear evidence in the book) and inappropriately assumed that this must automatically mean

it was a luxurious house. Presumably operating on the basis of this erroneous schema, he began to make assumptions about the characters:

> I like how they describe the room she's in, like, this is just walking and everything, and you know, you know for sure it's a very big house cause there's hallways and nice candles and everything. And she's got a, um, she's got this, I think, butler or something who's doing everything, he's showing her her way and everything.

Robert, who helps the heroine Cassy to set up her things in her bedroom, is, in fact, the son of one of the squatters. On the face of it, the idea that such a household could run to a butler is a preposterous interpretation and Hami registered some confusion every time Robert appeared. For a while, he appeared to think there were two separate characters. He spoke of Robert as a boy:

> On page 14, okay, I like this part because this, this nice guy comes over, this kid, who first came into the house. He, um, he, you know, all of a sudden he's happy that she's staying and everything, and you don't know why.

Yet, a few lines later, he labelled Robert as the butler again:

> Rob, the butler's just wondering what's going on and why she, and why her grandma, Nan, didn't come.

By the fourth chapter, Hami had dropped all reference to the idea of a butler and never mentioned the possibility again. Whether he had completely forgotten this particular misinterpretation or whether traces lingered to confuse his later reading is not clear from the transcript. Whether he continued to think of the squat as luxurious is also not clear.

Hami said it often took him a long time to "get attracted right into" a book. Perhaps as a consequence, he had a highly developed preference for books with sequels, "continuings" as he called them. "They make it more interesting because you know the character and everything and you know what he's been through." He referred more than once, directly and obliquely, to the fact that he had problems in the early stages of a book while he established the characters and their relationship to each other.

Re-reading might help Hami with some of these problems but, like many of the readers in this study, he never re-reads a whole book. He has, however, developed at least one rudimentary strategy for helping sort out his initial confusions. Sometimes when he is in the middle of a book and has finally grasped the way the plot and characters are fitting together, he will return to and re-read the opening chapter or two. It is not surprising that, having invested this much patience with confusion and this much effort at clarification, he is then happy to read sequels where the preliminary work has already been accomplished.

Hami's identification of Robert as the butler was "good enough" only in the sense that it enabled him to keep on reading. At any level of reasonable interpretation of the story, it was an egregious error. But many readers start off a book hampered by outrageously wrong initial assessments, and it is sometimes very easy to forget we have ever been so mistaken as the fictional situation becomes clearer. When this happens, how important is the initial mistake? Is it a worthwhile trade-off to be able to maintain an engagement with the story even at the cost of mistaken details? At what point does this trade-off become suspect? What happens when the mistaken assumptions linger, contaminating the interpretation of the entire story?

Brenda

Brenda, another eighth grader, offers a more complex case study in this area of what is and is not "good enough." Her mistake was in the area of major plot developments, rather than in an assessment of a single character.

Brenda's version of the plot did not hang together as a coherent whole. Her "good enough" interpretations enabled her to get from one page to another, but she found it difficult to describe the overall shaping of the book. In this sense, her reading might be described as an interpretive failure. She made suggestions which could not possibly be supported by the text:

> I think, you know, maybe Mick tried to hide the bomb in the house and then it just ended up in Cassy's bag somehow because it might have been there before, like, it might not have just been in the bag or something like that.

This interpretation makes a nonsense of important aspects of the plot and Brenda was never entirely happy with it. And yet, there were elements of her reading which, by many standards, could be called a success. Her insight into the character of the "villain" was relatively subtle and perceptive. With some guidance she was able to perceive the workings of the dream motif which threads through the entire novel. And, an issue whose importance cannot be overlooked, she declared that she had enjoyed the book and found it a good one. It would be easy to assume that this declaration represented some version of the halo effect, and undoubtedly that factor forms a part of her reaction, but her approval was stated several time in specific contexts which made it more convincing.

An important part of *Wolf* is the sequence of dreams, which takes up a few lines at the end of every alternating chapter. Although it is never spelled out explicitly, these dreams tell the story of Little Red Riding Hood, in parallel to the story of the book's main heroine, Cassy. That part of the transcript which shows Brenda exploring the later dream segments after she had finished her second reading of the first four chapters gives us some insight into a particular example of a reader developing:

> *Margaret*: The dreams go on, she's going through the forest and then, just have a look at the one on page 82, see where she gets to in this dream when she finally comes out of the forest and see if it reminds you of anything.
>
> *Brenda*: Ohh, Little Red Riding Hood!
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, just have a quick look through and look at them, see how, see how many--
>
> *Brenda*: They [the dream fragments] all go together now. Okay, I see. I didn't know what those flowers were, that's why I didn't--
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, it's distracting. And of course that ties in with the title too, doesn't it?
>
> *Brenda*: Yeah. Yeah, it does. Yeah, it's like, it's like, it's like a different version of the Big Bad Wolf, but she's in it, and I think it's her father who is the Big Bad Wolf.

If Brenda had been given some kind of classroom comprehension exercise on *Wolf*, she might

well have failed it. If she had been reading it on her own, she might well have been content to live with both the enjoyment and the confusion. I think we often ignore the fact that young readers may gain their satisfaction from novels in a rather piecemeal way, enjoying some aspects of a book, baffled by others, taking pleasure from the book as a collection of parts rather than as a complex whole. If we want readers to stretch beyond their current reading abilities, this kind of reading may well be an essential stepping stone. Sometimes a reading which is only partially "good enough" is the best a reader can manage with a new or challenging text. Unless we believe that the only valuable reading is one of complete mastery, we would do well to attend more carefully to the virtues and drawbacks of the kind of partially successful engagement which Brenda achieved.

How to make room for partially successful readings in the classroom is a delicate question. There is undoubtedly a risk that Brenda's mistakes with this text might render her very real achievements invisible to everyone, possibly including herself. To allow for growth is an important pedagogical goal but its accomplishment is not always straightforward.

Ed

Ed was an eleventh grade reader, and one who was able to be moderately explicit about an approach to the book which was unsatisfying to him and not "good enough" by most outside analysis. Ed's tastes were fairly literary; he was reading W.B. Yeats at the time of our interview and claimed to spend up to an hour and a half reading every night before bed.

Yet, as a reader of *Wolf*, Ed had a gap in his background repertoire which caused him some serious problems as he came to terms with the novel. He struggled with the two dream fragments in the four chapters we read together, and after the second reading, I asked him to look in sequence at all the dream sections in the novel. He knew there was something wrong with the associations called up in his head and struggled to clarify the problem.

> The story, of course is the, um, *Grandmother, what big eyes you have*, related to the, it related to the, to a fairy tale. I found it almost comical, picture the wolf in a nightcap, you know, with the sheets, kind of, sort of lying there, with this, you know, bangs and everything. It's really a cartoon wolf. So, um, I was amused, well, the actual impression is not all that amusing but I found this statement funny.

In a later part of our conversation, Ed provided further evidence that fairy tales did not have a really secure place in the repertoire he was trawling in order to make sense of this aspect of the novel. In the end, although I tried to draw the answer out of him, I had to give him the requisite title.

> *Ed*: I couldn't see the connection, Cassy being almost fourteen, why Nan would be reading to her about, you know, the big bad wolf, not the big bad wolf, I forget the name of the story.
>
> *Margaret*: The big bad wolf's "The Three Little Pigs," isn't it?
>
> *Ed*: Yeah. No, this is the other one, I suppose.
>
> *Margaret*: *Grandmother, what big eyes you have.*
>
> *Ed*: Yeah. [pause]

Margaret: That's "Little Red Riding Hood."

Ed: All right. Um, yeah, I, I didn't really connect with that, um, I couldn't, I couldn't find any connection myself.

Ed's response to the name of the title was very subdued. He didn't say, "Oh, of course!" or anything hinting at any thorough familiarity with this fairy tale. When he talked about the "cartoon wolf" image in his mind, he was sensitive enough to register that the affective implications of his image were inappropriate ("the actual impression is not all that amusing") but he seemed unable to produce an association with any more subtle reverberations. In that he was able to summon some barely sufficient vestiges of identification to gain an idea of the workings of the fairy tale in counterpoint to the main plot, his reading was "good enough" to be going on with; but he himself remarked on its limitations, and it seems clear that much of the complexity at work in the text at this point was simply lost on him.

"Good enough" reading

I could go on listing examples from the transcripts, but the responses of these students provide material for a wider discussion. I would like to explore some of the ramifications of the idea of a "good enough" reading.

I find the idea of a "good enough" reading both intriguing and disturbing. At one level, it is highly individual and idiosyncratic; particularly in a case of private, leisure reading it is something that can be established only by the particular reader who has no real need to defend a working compromise to anyone else.

A legitimate question can be asked about such a contingent phrase: good enough for what? This is a question with many variant answers in different reading situations. In the case of fiction reading, I suggest that one very important answer is the following: good enough to keep one engaged in the world of the fiction.

It is possible, however, to be somewhat more precise about the nature of the compromises which readers may make to sustain themselves in a fictional world. Reading is often compared to driving a car or riding a bicycle in the way it calls on automatized skills to serve a situation which is always new. In their work on beginning readers, Bussis *et al.* (1985) help to distinguish between the two main demands of the reading process: the need for momentum and the need for accountability. Different readers, they say, have different points of balance between these two requirements: some have a bias towards momentum and tend to go with the flow of the text, while others have a bias towards accountability and are more careful to understand every detail before proceeding. Many readers are more moderate and show less of propensity towards either end of the spectrum. What does seem clear from the evidence provided in their long-term study of new readers is that readers make judgements on their need to keep going versus their need to take care. One possible way, therefore, of defining a "good enough" read is a process which succeeds in finding a balancing point which works for a particular reader at a particular point in the text. This reader understands enough to be able to maintain momentum, or is able to keep enough momentum to help with understanding. This is a highly contingent and individual decision. The ability to recognize whether or not one is still engaged in the fictional universe provides a specific gauge of success which is clear-cut to the reader but private and unique to the singular situation. A compromise which is good enough for one reading may not

succeed in another.

There will be those who argue that I am talking about a debased form of reading. That kind of compromise which leads to a "good enough" outcome hardly sounds like a worthwhile pedagogical aim; indeed, it sounds very limited as a private and personal aim in recreational reading. Surely, as readers, as teachers, we need to be aiming higher.

This question deserves careful thought. I want to answer it by means of an extravagant metaphor, developed by Andrew Stibbs.

> Popular metaphors of engaged private reading say readers are "immersed" in the "world" of text. Whereas good advice to immersed non-swimmers is to relax, competent swimmers can have a lot more fun by thrashing about. They can pop out of the water, sometimes, to remind themselves that the water is not - as fish believe - the only world. Competent readers are amphibious: they can enjoy both the air and the water; they know the difference; from the atmosphere they can enjoy the view of the textual pond, and when they're in the pond they can recognise its surface as neither a mirror nor a window but an interface to be played with. What is good for you is not always a pleasure but amphibians need not be cold-blooded. Criticism is a pleasure in itself and children's enjoyment of comics and other ostentatiously unnaturalistic texts proves that pleasure is possible without entire suspension of disbelief. Meanwhile, for teachers, a rationale for teaching literature as texts for frogs - not documentaries for tadpoles - provides them with a defence against Mrs. Grundy. (58)

Stibbs describes the "amphibian," the experienced reader who knows there is more than one way to look at a text, who enjoys the rigours of using all available strategies to be immersed *and* to explore with more detachment. Teaching such readers is almost always a delight. Yet, most teachers know that many students have not reached the stage where this kind of reading is useful or even possible. To develop the terms of Stibbs' metaphor only a little further, there are many readers who do not know how to float in the world of the text.

If a reader has no real experience of being engaged by a fiction, of establishing a personal balance between momentum and care in such a way that the engagement can be sustained, then the teaching of strategies for analysis, criticism and resistance is at best irrelevant, at worst destructive. The aim of much literary teaching is to encourage ways of lingering within the world of the text, exploring how it has been assembled, finding ways to resist as well as engage with its composition. But if you don't know the pleasure of that world in the first place, the exercise of lingering there is one which offers little appeal.

Indeed, it is possible that students might learn to jump through the hoops, to produce the analytical end product without ever knowing the pleasure of the reading process which should precede any critical approach. Most English teachers have met students who know how to *break down* a textual composition but whose ability to *build up* a textual world is far less sure. What is "good enough" in such a situation?

It may clarify the terms of this discussion to look at an example of reading in progress which is manifestly not good enough for anybody's purposes. Daniel Pennac, in his bestselling book about the delights of pleasure reading, has produced an account of an adolescent trapped in his reading homework (*A Tale of Two Cities*):

> Now he is a reclusive adolescent in his room, faced with a book he cannot read. His desire to be elsewhere creates a smeary film between his eyes and the page. He is sitting in front of the window, the door closed behind him. Stuck on page 48. He can't bear to count the hours it took him just to get to this forty-eighth page. The book has exactly 446 of them. Might as well say 500. Five hundred pages! If only there were dialogues. No such luck! Pages stuffed with crowded lines between two narrow margins, dark paragraphs balancing one on top of the other with, now and again, the meager charity of a line of speech. A set of quotation marks like an oasis: one character is speaking to another. But the second character doesn't answer. Here comes another twelve-page block! A dozen pages of black ink! It's suffocating! Like being at the bottom of a mineshaft! . . . A book is an extremely dense object. It gives you no way in. It doesn't even burn very well. Fire can't slip between its pages. Not enough air in there. (20 - 21)

Pennac is hyperbolic rather than scientific in his description, but, as with Stibbs' amphibian metaphor, the excesses of description serve to highlight a huge but largely invisible problem in the whole complex area of literature teaching. The boy described by Pennac may well learn how to write an essay about Charles Dickens. He may even gain enough of a grasp of the story to write an examination, though the process will clearly be painful. But what is he learning about *reading* in the laborious activity described above?

Naturally many readers will find their first contact with someone like Charles Dickens to be confusing and overwhelming. This is not an argument for teaching only what they can readily master; far from it. However, we cannot afford to ignore the very real possibility that this kind of forced labour is what many students think reading *is*. No wonder they don't do it.

Pedagogical implications

The idea of "good enough" suggests many intriguing possibilities for the theoretical description of reading. For the rest of this paper, however, I would like to look at some more pragmatic issues: the pedagogical and curricular implications for teachers. The readings described by Daniel, Hami, Brenda and Ed, artificially articulated as they were, still retain some of the qualities of private and personal reading. What can we learn about such reading that will be of use when we think in terms of work in the classroom?

Daniel's account of his visual images, unsatisfactory and yet lingering, describes an aspect of reading probably not open to much social intervention. The inadequacy of his image of the "bungalowy" squat is something which he might never really raise to consciousness in normal reading conditions; and he himself remarked on how unamenable to revision this image was. No curricular work is likely ever to make a serious impact on any reader's spontaneous images. It is possible that a curriculum might be devised which would enable readers to become more reflective on their own imaging processes, but Daniel's account does not provide evidence either way about whether such an approach would be useful.

Hami's misunderstanding is open to a more conscious and deliberate intervention on the part of the teacher or another reader. In the research situation, I purposely confined myself to noting his reactions without comment, but it would not have been very difficult for me to raise a query about the idea of Robert as butler. Such queries are part of the ongoing discussions about texts in a classroom: "How did you get that idea? Does it work in the text?" On the other hand, challenging Hami's tentative interpretations as soon as he has

reached them--even if such a challenge is handled tactfully and delicately--might not be the best route to enabling him to establish his own strategies for sorting out confusions. His ability to plough on with a text in the face of muddle, returning to the initial chapters sometimes when he has begun to make sense of the middle of the book, is an achievement; even if it is not the most effective strategy in the world, it is one that he has worked out for himself, and its crucial value is that it enables him to keep on reading. More experience in reading (and here his fondness for sequels may be very productive) is clearly a necessary ingredient in Hami's development as a reader. It is also important to consider the fact that Hami dropped his misunderstanding about the butler without further comment. It could be that making a conscious correction would actually work to reinforce the idea of the butler in his memory. Leaping in too quickly to correct him might actually backfire.

Brenda's confusion over the details of the plot is probably more amenable to correction, but again,the pedagogical challenge is to preserve her very real accomplishments in the reading and interpretation of this book. It is important to remember that her understanding of the plot, misguided though it was, still enabled her to reach some crucial insights into the workings of the character and also provided a platform solid enough to allow her to develop a new understanding of the ways in which texts can be put together. These are considerable achievements. It is vital to remember that reading is not linear. In reading a book it is not simply a question of getting the beginning right, getting the middle right, and then getting the ending right. Indeed, Brenda's account shows that even understanding the ending is not necessarily enough to enable a reader to go back to the beginning again and understand it properly on the second time through. Many readers more experienced than Brenda will acknowledge that a particular error may linger over many readings of even a well-loved text. Obviously, however, one role of the literature class is to help readers reduce the number of such errors. There are, of course, many ways in which readers can help each other, and it is a clear necessity for the literature class to establish a reading community which supports reading growth.

Ed's problem with the novel was yet another kind, a failure (partial but real) of repertoire. Obviously, it would be better if the reader approached *Wolf* with a wide-ranging and evocative appreciation of fairy tales, particularly of "Little Red Riding Hood." Ed's background in this territory would appear to be vestigial and possibly largely based on television cartoons. The issue of readers approaching texts without an appropriate set of background knowledge is a problem which many teachers face. The question of Red Riding Hood raises an interesting sub-question: we need to consider not only *what* readers need to know in order to get the most out of a text, but we also need to give serious thought to *when* they need to know it.

The dream sequences in *Wolf* allude to the story of Red Riding Hood, at first very subtly and later more obviously, until, in a late dream, the line *Grandmother what big eyes you have* sends an unmistakable message. A reader who knows the story at all well should be unable to miss the reference. Ed, who was white and Western, and well-read by some standards of adolescent experience, struggled with identifying the allusion. His example reminds us that it is increasingly difficult to rely on a common background of literary experience in our classrooms. The pedagogical implications of this development are complex.

One strategic approach to teaching *Wolf* might be to start work on the book by looking at versions of Red Riding Hood. Even if no direct connection were made, the seed would be planted. On the other hand, one of the striking aspects of the transcripts is the very great pleasure taken by those readers who succeeded in making the connection without any

prompting. They were pleased with themselves for "getting it" but their pleasure went beyond that; they were also surprised and delighted to discover that it was possible for a text to play such tricks. I suspect that this pleasure would be substantially diluted if the connection were to be flagged beforehand. It may be that, in some classes, this would be a necessary trade-off; but I think it is important for teachers to remember the possibility of teaching creating loss as well as gain.

My own judgement is that, if I were teaching *Wolf*, I would be inclined to let the Red Riding Hood theme alone until the readers began to discover it for themselves. A first reading of a text is almost invariably inadequate, but the pleasures of surprise and discovery are major virtues of reading and should be allowed their fair quotient of classroom importance. If students only ever read books for which they are carefully prepared with advance building of vocabulary, establishing of repertoire or whatever, they may never realize at all that much of what we grasp as we read offers pleasures of a more serendipitous kind.

Teachers need to make room for risky reading, to allow readers to learn from their own mistakes (which may well be invisible to the outsider in any case). At the same time, simply settling for the virtues of readers' private experiences is pedagogically inadequate. If readers never compare their own interpretations with those of other people--whether these other people be friends, classmates, critics or teachers--then solipsism and misinterpretation can flourish unchecked. It is necessary to move beyond the basic minimum of exposing readers to a range of texts and letting them learn to find their own way through them. Thinking about texts, talking about texts, writing about texts, are all important activities in strengthening reading strategies. Reading does not stop at the limits of the individual; it is personally and privately experienced but it is also culturally and socially rooted.

Triangulation

Thomas Kent (1993), commenting on an unpublished paper of Donald Davidson's, "The Measure of the Mental," makes some suggestions about reading which may shed light on possible relationships between a privately "good enough" reading and a socially justifiable reading.

> For Davidson, the intimate and seemingly subjective knowledge that each of us possesses about our own mind arises only through triangulation with the other, other language users and other objects that constitute our shared world. Therefore, human subjectivity alone--in the sense of our subjective knowledge concerning our internal and non-public mental states--cannot account for the propositional attitudes we hold about the world. In order to hold propositional attitudes, we must communicate; for without other language users and without a shared world, no propositional attitudes could occur at all. (49 - 50)

Kent goes on to apply this account of language use to the activity of reading.

> In order to interpret a text, we require a reader, other readers, and a text. These three elements obviously correspond to the three apices of Davidson's communication model where the text assumes the place of an object in the world, a reader assumes the place of a language user, and other readers assume the place of other language users. As we read, we formulate passing theories in order to align our sense of what we are reading both with interpretations held by others and with the language in the

> text itself. Although these passing theories never match precisely, they nonetheless allow us to interpret well enough the meaning in a text by triangulating among what we know, what the text says, and what others say about it. (53)

It is important is to ensure that English teachers make room for students to develop their own private relationship with a text, to create their own personal bubble of "text-world." This personal and idiosyncratic creation, with all its peculiarities and inadequacies, lies at the heart of the reading experience. But, in addition to making a safe space for students to reach their own terms of accommodation with the text, the vital English classroom should allow ways and means of triangulation. Young readers need practice in learning their own strategies for creating a "good enough" reading, their own balancing point between momentum and accountability to the text. They also need to learn ways of aligning their readings with or against those of others, and to acquire capacities for returning to the text for clarification.

Re-reading

One specific issue arose from discussions with these readers: the question of re-reading. In the case of Daniel, he himself asserted that his original "wrong" image of the squat lingered in his mind even when he knew it was wrong; the traces lasted through the second reading as well, and it would be difficult to imagine how to alter what he chose to imagine.

In the cases of the other three readers, however, it is possible to see a potential teaching strategy: students read a text, or part of a text, silently, privately, establishing their own balance of momentum and accountability. This reading is followed by discussion, by clarification, by various forms of attention to the text, and the student returns to re-read the text which is now illuminated by new information and insight.

One snag with this appealing scenario is that a large proportion of the students in this project were adamant that they would never, under any circumstances, re-read for pleasure. Re-reading, to them, was irrevocably associated with the idea of work. They would re-read to produce an assignment, but the prospect was clearly an unpleasant duty. Even some of those who were very impressed with the book, even some of those who admitted that its complexity would reward the re-reader, were clear-cut in their refusal to consider the idea.

Not every reader felt this way, but a large enough number felt sufficiently strongly that it was noteworthy. Enhancing the pleasures of re-reading is one challenge for teachers which might lead to more sophisticated reading strategies for their pupils; on the other hand, many experienced and subtle readers also re-read very seldom and the question does not have a cut-and-dried answer.

Conclusion

All of the readers I have described here, indeed all of the readers in this small study, are familiar with the joys of reading. In this project I have attempted to explore what such readers may have to offer to the ways in which we teach those students who have never learned what it is like to read for pleasure. In this paper I have concentrated on one small strand of the reading experience, the ability to create an understanding "good enough" to keep the reader going. At one level, this is a mundane accomplishment with as many drawbacks as positive elements. In another way, it is a crucial element of reading independence. If a reader cannot find a way to be sustained in the text, then the reason and the reward for reading both become unclear. We cannot expect to enjoy every text on

every occasion; but we need to be alert to the needs of those students who have never gained any true expectation of enjoyment from any text. We must find ways to allow room for these students to learn how to pace themselves through a book, to learn that although sometimes you may need to stop and find out more information, sometimes a more pressing need is just to keep going. No single reading is ever going to be "good enough" on any kind of divine scale of absolutes; but the small "good enough" decisions are often more important than we think in the establishment of routes to reading success.

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